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[Picturing] Italy in Poetry and Prose

*Collected Perspectives on Italy in Victorian Travel
Literature, 1842-1877*

A Senior Thesis in English
Vassar College, Spring 2021

Advised by Professor Susan Zlotnick
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Introduction

Graduating from Vassar with an English and Italian double major, I envisioned the thesis as an opportunity to combine both my areas of study in a way I had not been able to previously. Though this thesis is written with the English department, my Italian major has been in my mind and my heart throughout the whole process. The year that I spent studying in Bologna, Italy was one of the most formative experiences of my life both personally and academically, and it opened my mind to the kind of work I am capable of as a student and what I want to contribute to the world of academia. I am proud to consider this thesis a small addition to an underdeveloped area of scholarship and the first work to place the authors I will soon mention in conversation with one another. While it is by no means comprehensive or exhaustively researched, this thesis was my attempt to assemble a range of literary voices, both known and unknown, to investigate how the British conceived of “Italy” during the periods before, during, and after Italy’s unification in 1861. My goal was to determine whether the country’s official unification impacted the way the Victorians imaged Italy as a cultural and political space. Through the writings of the authors I analyze, I came to understand the relationship between the Victorians and Italy as determined more by the form and content of their travel writing rather than by the temporality of their visit.

In an effort to include the most widely representative travel literature, I have selected one author of established fame and one author of comparatively unknown literary background for each chapter. The first chapter, which focuses on travel literature from the 1840s to lay the groundwork for Victorian engagement with Italy before unification, analyzes the work of Charles Dickens and Charles David Badham. Charles Dickens spent the year from 1844 to 1845 living and traveling in Italy, and he published his observations as a travelogue titled *Pictures*

from Italy in 1846. His narrative, while significant because of his personal influence on Victorian literature and his prowess as a novelist, constitutes a representative example of the type of narratives tourists wrote to document their travels through a foreign country. Dickens consciously innovates the genre of travel writing, but the perspective revealed by his account only reaffirms the old conception of Italy as a purely aesthetic cultural space with no political existence. C.D. Badham published his travel narrative from 1842 anonymously in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* under the title "Roamings in Rome." He was a naturalist and a physician rather than an author by trade, and the anonymity of the magazine ensured that he was entirely unknown as a writer to his readers. His account parallels Dickens's in many ways, including in its refusal to consider Italy a modern and political nation. Both authors record their observations from the position of an Englishman traveling abroad in Italy, a style of prose writing which inherently leads them to consider Italy unimaginatively as "other" and reduces their ability to view the country holistically.

The second chapter, which analyzes literature from the 1850s to determine the tenor of the British perspective on Italy in the years directly involved with the question of unification, introduces the genre of political poetry. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem *Casa Guidi Windows* from 1851 offers the most famous example of political poetry taking Italy's nationhood as its subject. Both Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were widely read poets in England, but Barrett Browning's fame outstripped that of her husband's during her lifetime. Her poetry presents the first comprehensive conception of Italy as both cultural and political, developing the idea of an aesthetic appreciation of Italy that leads into active political support of the country's fight for independence. Approaching Italy through the creative lens of poetry allows Barrett Browning to engage more imaginatively across national borders, adopting a sense

of shared identity impossible in the more restrictive prose of the other authors. In 1859, Frederick Hardman sent a letter to *Blackwood's* titled "Tidings from Turin" that presents an entirely contrary perspective on Italy. As a British overseas correspondent and a journalist for many periodicals, Hardman returns to the prose writing of Dickens and Badham, but with a political science and international relations-based approach. As a result, his letter reveals a perspective that considers Italy in exclusively political terms, entirely ignoring the world-renowned cultural and aesthetic value of the country. His style of prose writing equally restricts him to a limited perception of Italy, centering his identity as an Englishman and reducing his imagination of Italy to a wholly political and acultural entity.

The final chapter covers the late 1860s and 1870s to gain an understanding of how the Victorian perspective developed in the years following Italy's official unification. As evidenced by the 1877 travel diary of Miss Mary Jane Furby, Italy's emergence as an independent and unified nation did not produce any change in the way certain British travelers engaged with Italy. Her diary, written after the style of Dickens's travel narrative, embraces the image of Italy that had circled for decades in the guidebooks and Romantic poetry of the preceding generations. Though ostensibly a record of her personal thoughts and observations, Miss Furby's diary does nothing more than reiterate the words of the travelers and poets who came before her, recycling the old understanding of Italy as a cultural and aesthetic space. Writing in a continuation of the prosaic travel genre employed by Dickens and Badham, Miss Furby remains equally one sided in her approach to Italy, unaffected by the momentous political change experienced by the country in the intervening years. In contrast, Algernon Charles Swinburne, a prominent albeit controversial literary figure, carries on the tradition of political poetry introduced by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Though he does not acknowledge the debt that his work owes to her poetry,

Swinburne follows in Barrett Browning's footsteps when he centers both the Italian revolutionary effort and Italy as an aesthetic entity in his poetry. Once more embracing the poetic slide between national identities, Swinburne's writing indicates the continuation of a holistic imagination of Italy in the decades immediately succeeding unification.

When read together as a cohesive narrative, the works of these six authors reveal the presence of three intertwining perspectives threaded through several decades of Victorian literary engagement with Italy. The first two, both founded in prose travel writing, present opposite sides to the same approach: one views Italy as an entirely cultural and aesthetic space, while the other treats Italy as an exclusively political entity. Equally restrictive in their understanding of Italy as "other," both methods reduce writers to a one-dimensional perspective on Italy. Only political poetry, the third avenue of engagement, transcends that sense of "otherness" to embrace Italy as a complete and multi-faceted nation. Through these varied conceptions of Italy traveling home toward England on the pages of the British writers abroad, an intellectual war was fought over Italy's identity in addition to the physical war carried out in the Italian streets. Moreover, all three perspectives continue to define the Victorian imagination of Italy throughout and beyond the years of Italy's unification, genre displacing decade as the significant variable. My intent in this thesis is not to claim that poetry as a genre of writing has the ability to dissolve nationally recognized political borders and concretely redefine the contours of identity. Such an argument would require a greater knowledge of political and literary theory than I currently possess. However, poetry as a medium gave Barrett Browning and Swinburne the illusion, if not the true capacity, of transcending national borders and placing themselves in the position of another people. The perspective made possible by that illusion is fundamental to the representation of Italy as a holistic space in a particular subset of Victorian travel literature: political poetry.

Chapter One

The Englishman in Italy

Dickens and the Legacy of the Guidebook

In planning and executing his year-long stay in Italy, Dickens is acutely aware of the long-established tradition of visiting Italy as part of the “Grand Tour,” a voyage undertaken by English aristocrats for their edification. These English visitors frequently traveled to an established list of the major cities which had been deemed appropriate or necessary to see, and they viewed the cities and monuments through a distinctly Romantic lens. The publication of Murray’s first *Handbooks for Travellers* in 1836, written for a middle-class audience of moderate economic means, democratized the process of travel and initiated a post-Grand Tour period in which more English natives had the ability to travel abroad (McNees, 2007). Through the consultation of these *Handbooks*, or other notable guidebooks of the time such as *Baedeker’s Guides* or *Cook’s Tourist’s Handbooks*, the middle-class tourist had access to a predetermined course of travel through several foreign countries, complete with details about which cities to visit, the best places to stay, and historical information about the cultural attractions in each location. In her article “Reluctant Source: Murray’s Handbooks and Pictures from Italy,” Eleanor McNees reflects on the relationship between this history of guidebooks as the predominant form of travel literature and the project undertaken by writers such as Charles Dickens in the publication of their personal travelogues. She states that in *Pictures from Italy*, “Dickens deliberately set out to write a travel book against the guidebook genre” (McNees, 2007), affirming his conscious desire to distinguish the form and content of his travelogue as distinct from, if not directly opposed to, the form and content of a travel guide. From my

perspective, Dickens achieves a partial victory: his account represents a view of Italy less mediated by historical information, but despite his notoriety as a famous novelist, he does not manage to innovate the genre of travel narratives any more than common writers such as C. D. Badham, who will be introduced later in this chapter.

Ironically, as McNees points out, Dickens and Murray share a target audience; both aim at engaging a middle-class readership interested in visiting Italy, either in person or vicariously through the journeys of others, who had historically been precluded from the aristocratic and intellectualized Grand Tour (McNees, 2007). The key difference between guidebooks such as Murray's *Handbooks* and Dickens's *Pictures from Italy* lies in the less tangible quality of that middle-class reader as either tourist or traveler. Dickens eschews the English tourist who follows Murray's guidebook to the letter, accepting the prescribed path of travel without an ounce of individual thought and never deviating from the beaten path. As I will discuss in the third chapter, Miss Mary Jane Furby perfectly typifies the tourist that Dickens describes as relying completely on the guidebook to experience Italy. While imparting immensely beneficial advice for foreign travel, guidebooks also functioned as mediators between the tourist and the observed object or vista, clouding the moment of interaction so as to replace original and spontaneous contemplation with rote confirmation of previously studied facts (McNees, 2007). Dickens rejects this artificial model of foreign travel created and enabled by guidebooks, choosing to direct his own writing towards the traveler rather than the tourist. However, he deceives himself in thinking that he views Italy through an unmediated lens simply because he does not follow a guidebook page for page. His vision is equally clouded, though it is his English identity rather than the words of another author which acts as the obstacle between his eyes and a holistic perception of Italy. The prosaic nature of the travelogue genre, which necessitates that Dickens

write from his identity as an Englishman passing through Italy, restricts him to a particular form of interaction with the country before he even arrives.

Unlike the tourist, the traveler retains some of the Romanticism of the Grand Tour while dispensing with the aristocratic unwillingness to “dirty one’s hands.” Even if they visit the same cities and view the same sights as their upper-class predecessors, travelers infuse their journey with spontaneity and poeticism to connect more deeply with the country than was considered desirable on the Grand Tour. *Pictures from Italy* does not supply the reader with the same quantity of helpful detail as a guidebook, and therefore avoids a prosaic abundance of historical facts. Instead, it provides reflections of a journey through Italy in the spirit of traveling “off the beaten path” that engages more creatively with the country. Thus, the content of Dickens’s travelogue differs markedly enough from the guidebooks he expressly wishes not to imitate. However, it is only because of the proliferation of guidebooks that writers such as Dickens have the freedom to avoid practical detail in their own narratives and embrace their personal interests and “poetic reveries,” since they need not concern themselves with providing adequate information to hopeful tourists (McNees, 2007). Additionally, Dickens’s background in journalism and his fame as a novelist mean that he does not fully abandon the prosaic in his travelogue. His personal narrative expands the way prose is used to sketch an encounter with Italy, but functions less as an innovation and more as a reimagining of the old guidebook tradition. The genre of travel literature inherently reinforces clearly defined lines of nationality through its emphasis on what is “foreign” and therefore worth recording as a part of the experience of travel. As a British native journeying through Italy and engaging with the country through such a prosaic and nationally prescriptive genre of writing, Dickens experiences Italy as

his predecessors did, romanticizing the country's past and valuing Italy primarily for its cultural and aesthetic value.

Reflecting on his Travels: Pictures from Italy

In his daily wandering, Dickens's observations of the realities of the Italian culture and landscape do not always seem to fit with this conceptualization of "Italy" as a whole. The final paragraph of his travelogue praises the beauty and cultural richness of modern Italy, yet he rarely speaks so positively in the central bulk of the narrative. Far more frequently, he laments the appearance of filth and decay he encounters in each new place and the moral inferiority of the Italian people. Upon his first arrival in Genoa, the town in which he has rented a house for the next year, he declares:

I never in my life was so dismayed! The wonderful novelty of everything, the unusual smells, the unaccountable filth (though it is reckoned the cleanest of the Italian towns), the disorderly jumbling of dirty houses, one upon the roof of another; the passages more squalid and more close than any in St. Giles's or old Paris; in and out of which, not vagabonds, but well-dressed women, with white veils and great fans, were passing and repassing; the perfect absence of resemblance in any dwelling-house, or shop, or wall, or post, or pillar, to anything one had ever seen before; and the disheartening dirt, discomfort, and decay; perfectly confounded me. I fell into a dismal reverie. Dickens, 20

This is Dickens's first impression of Italy, the country in which he will live and travel for the next year while writing both *Pictures from Italy* and his Christmas book *The Chimes*. His initial observations on the cleanliness and physical character of the space are clearly not favorable, and his palpable dismay reveals that he had not expected the level of "dirt, discomfort, and decay" which he encounters.

According to Clotilde De Stasio, descriptions of Italy around Dickens's time repeatedly emphasized the general lightness and radiance of the country. As she explains, "brilliant",

‘bright’, ‘wonderful’, were the most common adjectives in travel reports on Italy since the time of the Grand Tour, and ‘splendour’ and ‘splendid’ were also recurring words” (De Stasio, 2010). Dickens documented his own reading of several of these travel guides and travelogues before he set off on his year-long tour, and they had undoubtedly inspired visions of a much brighter, clearer, and more expansive Italy than the reality facing him in Genoa. In addition, he specifically notes how he considers Genoa unlike “anything one had ever seen before,” indicating that he perceives a distinct sense of otherness from the town. To Dickens, Genoa is decidedly foreign, leading the reader to wonder if he had expected a town in a different country with a different population and a different climate to resemble his own native country. As I will mention in the second chapter, Elizabeth Barrett Browning discusses the concept of British appropriation of Italian aesthetics for its own cultural milieu, and this practice may have led Dickens to expect more similarities between England and Italy than he finds in reality.

However unfavorable his first impression of the town might be, he does later come to amend his opinion of the town and the townspeople considerably. Francis Palgrave, the first editor of the *Hand-Book for Travellers in Northern Italy*, published in 1842 as part of the collection of *Murray’s Handbooks*, points out that tourists frequently form a misguided or incomplete understanding of the character of a country’s inhabitants given that their interactions with the native population are frequently limited to those individuals whose occupation consists of catering to the tourists’ demands. Despite Dickens’s general desire to cast himself in the flattering role of the traveler, McNees argues that Genoa is the one place where he truly succeeds in transcending the state of the tourist as a result of his prolonged stay in the two houses which he rented there. Given the length of his stay and his habit of “taking daily walks,” she writes that “in Genoa he could afford to leave the beaten track and wander” (McNees, 2007), a luxury which

enabled him to form a more holistic impression of the town than that of the tourists described by Palgrave. When passing rapidly through several towns and cities in one whirl of constant motion, Dickens forms very unfavorable opinions of the locals and does not succeed in breaking beyond superficial and stereotypical observations of Italian character. When remaining for a longer stretch of time in one city, McNees determines that “he does penetrate more deeply into the character of the Genoese,” and ultimately arrives at a higher opinion of the city and the people who inhabit it (McNees, 2007). As a more settled resident, Dickens may also have been able to soften the effect of his British identity in Genoa enough to expand his perception of the town. But if he truly does arrive at the level of praise that McNees claims, he does not make that abundantly clear in *Pictures from Italy*.

Yet he does not form an unfavorable impression of every town that he passes briefly through. As part of his effort to reach beyond the beaten path and describe to the reader more than just the major cities and exalted monuments mentioned in every guidebook, Dickens dwells substantially on the merits of some of the smaller coastal towns. He lavishes praise on these minor localities, subtly protesting how the Romanticism of the Grand Tour directed all its energy towards ecstasies over the paintings and statues of the Renaissance masters and ignored smaller towns without renown. He declares:

There is nothing in Italy, more beautiful to me, than the coast-road between Genoa and Spezzia... Some of the villages are inhabited, almost exclusively, by fishermen; and it is pleasant to see their great boats hauled up on the beach, making little patches of shade, where they lie asleep, or where the women and children sit romping and looking out to sea, while they mend their nets upon the shore. There is one town, Camoglia, with its little harbour on the sea, hundreds of feet below the road; where families of mariners live, who, time out of mind, have owned coasting-vessels in that place, and have traded to Spain and elsewhere. Seen from the road above, it is like a tiny model on the margin of the dimpled water, shining in the sun. Descended into, by the winding mule-tracks, it is a perfect miniature of a primitive seafaring town: the saltiest, roughest, most piratical little place that ever was seen. Dickens, 86

Dickens treats the town's proportions as irresistibly quaint. It is a "tiny model" rather than a full-bodied place, and a "perfect miniature" instead of a thriving seafaring town. But his diminutive concept of the town is balanced by the grandness of the townspeople's occupation, as evidenced in his remark about the "great boats hauled up on the beach." The lives of the inhabitants, not as individuals with discrete identities, but as defined by their occupation, are what render the place so charming in Dickens's eyes. In writing such passages, Dickens is actively attempting to contribute to the understanding of what makes Italy beautiful in England's eyes—no longer only the monuments and art of the famous cities, but also the towns and their humble industries. The labor associated with the large boats and fishing is complemented by the depiction of peaceful languor represented by those who lie asleep in the shade or sit gazing out to sea. This apparently effortless fusion of honest labor with the Italian concept of the *dolce far niente* combines in Dickens' mind to form the most beautiful sight in Italy. After Dickens, other writers such as Algernon Charles Swinburne will come to expand that definition of beauty to include the Italian people themselves.

Yet one word in particular anchors his description of Camogli: "primitive." This word underscores the fact that Charles Dickens does not visit Italy with the expectation or desire of touring a modern country in the midst of a political struggle for unity and autonomy. The rebellions of 1848 and 1849 likely had precursors as early as 1844-1845 when Dickens was in Italy, but his readers could easily remain ignorant of any political turmoil if they took only *Pictures from Italy* as a source. He arrives with the desire to see a country romantically enveloped in the past, preserving even in modern times the lifestyle of preceding generations and untainted by political strife. Centered in the British imagination as a country with a rich and lengthy history, the Italy that Dickens expects to see has remained largely uncorrupted by the

industrialization sweeping through his native land. Camoglia as a “primitive seafaring town” solidifies Dickens’ image of a simpler and more attractive past in the form of a quaint town, surviving on the Italian coastline as a perfect example of a culture and lifestyle largely untouched by the passage of time. When he finds physical confirmation of that mental image, he records the evidence with deep appreciation.

His visit to the nearby mining town of Carrara reinforces the impressions he formed at Camoglia, this time through a different local occupation. Having congratulated himself for finding a sufficiently out-of-the-way town unsoiled by a constant flow of tourists, he describes the laborious and frequently deadly method employed by the inhabitants to transport blocks of marble down the hillside after mining it from the land:

Imagine the clumsy carts of five hundred years ago, being used to this hour, and drawn, as they used to be, five hundred years ago, by oxen, whose ancestors were worn to death five hundred years ago, as their unhappy descendants are now, in twelve months, by the suffering and agony of this cruel work! Two pair, four pair, ten pair, twenty pair, to one block, according to its size; down it must come, this way. In their struggling from stone to stone, with their enormous loads behind them, they die frequently upon the spot; and not they alone; for their passionate drivers, sometimes tumbling down in their energy, are crushed to death beneath the wheels. But it was good five hundred years ago, and it must be good now: and a railroad down one of these steepes (the easiest thing in the world) would be flat blasphemy. Dickens, 88-89

The repetition of the phrase “five hundred years ago,” repeated still more in sentences surrounding the above quotation, forces upon the reader the intensity of Dickens’s fixation on how time interacts with the life of the town. It is unclear from his writing how much of Dickens’s knowledge of the people’s history comes from conversation with them or solely from his observations of their customs. The “blasphemy” he writes of may be an accurate reflection of the people’s attitude towards the modernization of their methods, reported to him by the workers themselves. Yet the tone of the paragraph, at once enchanted and condescending, savors of a British outsider’s view of the town. Personally unconnected to the physical hardships and

dangers experienced by the townsfolk, Dickens is free to imagine that they prefer carrying on the traditions of their ancestors and scorning any suggestion of industrialization. He passes through just long enough to observe from his British perspective how a railroad might easily improve the efficacy and safety of their work, then proceeds on his way contentedly convinced that such a change would be sacrilegious in the minds of the workers. Whether or not his assumption accurately reflects the thoughts of the people of Carrara, their hardship allows Dickens to preserve his image of their town as “primitive” and captivatingly picturesque in its continuity with the past.

As an Englishman, Dickens is not engaging with Italy for its independent value as a nation, but with Italy as both foundation and foil of England. The Italy that Dickens finds most interest in—the Italy that is picturesque, primitive, and apolitical—stands in contrast to all that his native country embodies as an industrialized, modern, and political entity. De Stasio writes that “contrasting Italy (or any foreign country) with England was one of the most common devices used in travel reports in order to make the unfamiliar familiar, and most of the time to underline the superiority of the motherland over the visited countries” (De Stasio, 2010). Thus, the paradox of Italy as both unlike anything Dickens had ever seen and the ancestor of the British Empire fits seamlessly into the greater tradition of travel writing. Having previously asserted British superiority over the primitive Italian coastal towns through his romanticization of their difficulties, he proceeds to draw on what he considers positive about Italy—the power, grandeur, and importance of ancient Rome—to further bolster his pride in his own nationality.

He places great significance on the antique elements of the city to describe his experience in Rome. After already having been in the city for almost two days and having visited St. Peter’s Basilica, it is not until he goes to see the Colosseum that Dickens declares “here was Rome

indeed at last” (Dickens, 100). The palpable breath of relief in this sentence reveals that in his eyes, Rome could not be effectively experienced at any other monument, nor by walking through the city in two days’ worth of regular transit. McNees states that the tourist draws on the information and authority inherent in the guidebook to confirm the “authenticity” of the sights which he or she visits (McNees, 2007). Dickens, she argues, achieves this assurance through his visit to the Colosseum: “there, finally, his schoolboy’s fancy of classical Rome finds validation, and his experience becomes—for him—authentic” (McNees, 2007). To Dickens, “Rome” implies everything that the Colosseum represents: glory, majesty, bloodshed, violence, and the power of the Roman Empire. Its many cathedrals, its individual streets, and even the first view of its skyline in the distance are not enough to enable him to feel that he has truly arrived at the Eternal City; only the Colosseum has the power to convey that grand impression and to authenticate his experience of Rome.

In his unstructured rambling through the rest of the city, he remarks that “it is strange to see, how every fragment, whenever it is possible, has been blended into some modern structure, and made to serve some modern purpose” (Dickens, 128-9). A phenomenon very natural in every city with a lengthy history—that is, the incorporation of the historical spaces into the modern evolving life of the city—strikes Dickens as strange when he encounters it in Rome. McNees writes that “Dickens’s tone is alternately melancholic, almost nostalgic, and mocking as if his imagined picture refuses to reconcile itself with the reality of 1840s Rome” (McNees, 2007). Prior to his visit, he might have harbored the romantic notion that the extant fragments from the Roman Empire would be fully separated as a world unto their own, distinct from the later developments of the city, but he finds instead that a whole modern landscape has sprung up in and around the historical flotsam. His tendency to overemphasize the ruins from antiquity,

coupled with lengthy imaginative episodes in which he indulges in dramatized re-creations of the city's gory past, suggest that these elements take priority in his mind and prevent him from experiencing Rome as a modern city.

However, the wording of McNees's statement bears reflection; she considers his tone "almost nostalgic," not quite nostalgic in full. In her article "'God Be Thanked: A Ruin!' The Rejection of Nostalgia in *Pictures from Italy*," adapted for the *Dickens Quarterly* from a talk she delivered in Genoa, Sally Ledger argues for the complete absence of nostalgic reflection in Dickens's descriptions of Italy. While it appears more absolute than might be warranted given the nuance of Dickens's attitude towards Italy, Ledger's stance validates McNees's insertion of the word "almost" before "nostalgic." Dickens does not, in fact, desire the return of the Roman Empire or the revival of all that he associates with it. In his personal letters and in his other published writing, Dickens outright rejects exaltation of "the good old days," and Ledger claims that his "sense of awe at Rome's magnificent, bloody past... is tempered by a determination to embrace modern Italy" (Ledger, 2009). If Dickens was determined to embrace modern Italy, it was at best a weak determination. His appreciation of the modern city stems not from an admiration for its immediate value but from the perspective that views Rome as the antecedent to the modern British Empire. Encapsulated in the prosaic and nationally distinctive travelogue genre, the centrality of his British identity mediates Dickens's experience of Italy and influences the contradictory image he forms of the country as deeply historical and apolitical, a country entirely opposite to England while also the birthplace of British superiority.

Another Charles: The Writing of C.D. Badham

Charles David Badham (1805-1857) was an English contemporary of Charles Dickens, though a naturalist rather than a writer by trade. Holding a medical degree and a fellowship with the College of Physicians that allowed him to practice in other countries, Badham traveled frequently to Italy for extended periods of time, and “was for a decade—from 1839 to 1849—one of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine’s* steadiest and most prolific writers of articles on Italy” (McNees, 2009). Badham’s identity as a British national traveling abroad and his experience writing texts related to medicine and nature visibly determine his intellectual posture when writing travel literature about Italy for the magazine. *Blackwood’s*, a popular Tory magazine in England in print from 1817 to 1980, published articles covering a diverse range of topics from foreign affairs and travel to poetry and serialized works of fiction, while maintaining a policy of anonymity for all its contributing authors. As a result of this policy, Badham was identified as the writer of the series “Sketches of Italy” and many other articles only after his death (McNees, 2009). In addition to the series of “Sketches,” he also wrote a two-part series entitled “Roamings in Rome,” published in volumes 51 and 52 of *Blackwood’s* in 1842. Though lacking Dickens’s obvious excellence as a writer, Badham spent enough time in Italy and wrote with enough dramatic narrative effect to captivate his readers and paint a compelling image of the country, despite his similar inability to represent Italy holistically on the written page.

Emerging a few years before Dickens’s trip to Italy in 1844 and his subsequent writings about Rome, Badham’s account of the city anticipates and parallels *Pictures from Italy* in many ways. The narrative opens with a description of an encounter in St. Peter’s Basilica, a popular place among the English tourists. That both Badham and Dickens would dwell on their visits to such a predominant monument can hardly be surprising, especially when Badham explains that

by virtue of the cathedral's excellence as a place to both exercise and socialize, "the gilt Barberine *bees* accordingly swarm not more thickly on its roof above than do the *restless* English on the pavement below" (Badham, 347). The restlessness of the English might indicate that the tourists are less awed by the monument than the guidebooks would lead readers to believe. Similarly, Badham's own wandering mind might account for the fascinated attention he pays to one particular devotee at the church: "*Il Ministro di Giustizia*" (Badham, 347). Through the dramatization of recorded dialogue, Badham soon makes clear to that branch of his readership unfamiliar with the Italian language that this gentleman, a "respectable looking person with earrings, carrying an umbrella, and now on his knees before St Peter" (Badham, 347), is the city's appointed executioner. When *Murray's Handbooks* detail the many attractions of the grand and imposing cathedral, they do not dwell on the individual personages one might encounter there, much less those of such a macabre occupation as an executioner. Through his choice of subject matter, Badham conforms as Dickens does to the guidebook's tradition of writing about St. Peter's, but he too departs drastically from the prescribed method for discussing the landmark. His decision to write at length about the executioner in an article of very few pages also indicates his mental association of Italy and capital punishment, an association he wishes his readers to share after reading his narrative.

In addition, he makes a continual effort to scatter Italian words and phrases into his writing, both as a direct part of his own speech and through the representation of dialogue with native Italian speakers. In many cases, the Italian words add nothing of value to the content of the narrative; Badham reports the residence of the executioner by writing that "his house was hard by, at the Porta Angelica, *numero* something—for we did not note down the address—*secondo piano*" (Badham, 347). Recording the unremembered house number and specifying that

he lives on the “second floor” in Italian does not enhance the scene other than to serve as a reminder to readers that it takes place in Italy and is therefore not a commonplace English conversation. In the same vein, even when he translates dialogue into English, he retains minor grammatical inaccuracies that imply an Italian native’s inability to speak grammatically correct English. When he asks questions from a stranger on the street, he receives the answer, “yes, before sunset, unless the Santo Padre himself interfere, and order otherwise” (Badham, 349). To write “unless the Pope *interferes*, and *orders* otherwise” would represent the conversation as too British, and to complicate the grammar more could risk displeasing or confusing *Blackwood’s* English readers. Badham treads the middle ground, including just enough unimportant Italian phrases and minute English errors to maintain the “foreign feel” that his readers would look for when reading a travel narrative from a foreign country. As an unknown writer, Badham’s scattering of Italian through his prose might confirm his authority to speak knowledgably about Italy in his readers’ minds. At the same time, this evidence of the Italians’ inability to speak grammatically standard English increases the sense of difference between Badham as a British prose writer and the allegedly inferior Italian populace. Thus, Badham’s narrative also reveals how his identity as an Englishman is central to his interpretation of his experience in Italy and influences his view of the Italian people.

As Dickens finds authentication of his experience through daily visits to the Colosseum, so too does Badham dwell on the presence of the antiques and the vestiges of the ancient Roman Empire when roaming through the city. Despite the horror he professes at the sight of the executioner in St. Peter’s Basilica, he eagerly attends the public beheading of two sentenced criminals—an inspiration, perhaps, for Dickens’s own attendance at a beheading in Rome two years later. The scene causes Badham to consider the way modern and ancient apparatuses

maintain their presence and merge their influence in the Eternal City, and he reflects, “if the incident were striking to have met the carnifex in the great Christian temple of modern Rome, it was not less so to see the modern instrument of capital punishment (so associated with the revolutionary horrors in our times) alight, as it were, from the clouds, like an obscene vulture, amidst the ruins of Rome” (Badham, 349). Innocuous as this reflection on the guillotine may seem, it reveals the fundamental principal by which C. D. Badham views the city of Rome and its history. He speaks of St. Peter’s as representing “modern Rome,” and while construction of the cathedral was completed in the height of the Renaissance over 200 years before Badham’s time, readers in the mid-nineteenth century might conceivably consider the landmark a fairly recent addition to the Roman cityscape. However, he does not contrast this definition of “modern” Rome to any specific element of “ancient” Rome; rather, he writes of the guillotine as standing amidst the ruins of “Rome,” with no descriptive addition. He thereby reveals his prejudice towards the older Rome as the more authentic version of the city, relegating more recent additions, albeit incredibly important ones, to a secondary and therefore less powerful manifestation of “Rome.”

Badham’s meditations on the cultural relation between ancient and modern Rome also extend to encompass the city’s people; at the scene of the beheading, he watches “the people now fast collecting to see blood spilt, as did their ancestors in the Colosseum hard by” (Badham, 349). Intertwining allusions to the past with his description of the present, his narration causes the intervening span of time to shrink in the minds of his readers, shuffling the modern people before him into one contiguous group with the historic citizens of the Roman Empire. He goes on to deplore the base emotion which draws such crowds to a public execution, lamenting that “so far from the crowd being hushed or awed, so far from all men’s tongues being employed in

whispers on the horrid crimes which had entailed the punishment, the movement was one, we repeat, of mere curiosity” (Badham, 349-350). He intentionally repeats himself in his desire to convey the crude lack of reverence displayed by the Italian crowd. Never mind that he himself could have no greater reason than curiosity to attend such a gruesome spectacle in a foreign country, or that he read the announcement posted the day before and “accordingly set off to see a guillotine among the ruins of ancient Rome!” (Badham, 348). His own participation in the scene does not reflect on his character, and certainly not on the character of the *Blackwood’s* readers consuming his narration in the comfort of their own homes. But the Roman public, among whom Badham stands shoulder to shoulder before the scaffold, are reduced by the Englishman to mere replicas of people hundreds of years in the past; he allows them no evolution of character, no opportunity to form an identity separate from that of their distant ancestors. His unwillingness to allow them a modernity also precludes consideration of modern politics or social movements from his consciousness when engaging with the Italian people. The political world has no place in Badham’s vision of Rome—ironically, the city that will soon become the capitol of the new nation—and the construction of his narrative allows his readers to ignore that aspect of Italy as well.

Looking Forward, Leaning Back

As Eleanor McNees discusses in her chapter titled “Accounts for the Arm-Chair Traveller: The Italy of Badham and Dickens,” both C. D. Badham and Charles Dickens occupy “a specific moment in British travel writing: the brief span between the demise of the Grand Tour and the construction of railways across Europe and the subsequent proliferation of mass tourism” (McNees, 2009). Situated after the advent of Grand Tour-style guidebooks, but before

the introduction of efficient railway travel, writers like Badham and Dickens enjoy closer contact to the people and the landscapes they visit. They embody the new travelers; middle class rather than aristocratic, focused on observing the Italian people and culture more than on taking in the classical sights (McNees, 2009). Francis Palgrave writes in the introduction to the *Hand-Book for Travellers in Northern Italy* that his aim is to describe to the reader what *ought* to be seen, in order to reduce to a manageable portion the overwhelming amount of all that *may* be seen (McNees, 2007). The superior and patronizing tone in Palgrave's statement of intent directly contrasts with Badham's and Dickens's approaches to their travel narratives, in which they seek to balance descriptions of cultural landmarks and monuments with observations of the customs and characters of the Italian people. But as *Pictures from Italy* and "Roamings in Rome" reveal, both writers are unwilling to admit the extent to which guidebooks still dictate the shape and direction of their engagement with Italy. Despite their freer use of prose and more personal reflections on Italy, both writers approach their travel narratives according to the perspective established by the guidebook genre: that is, as Englishmen with a strictly delineated national identity, visiting Italy to experience it as a foreign landscape with a rich cultural past. Accordingly, contemplation of Italy's political state or existence as a gendered space—topics which will gain central significance in the writing of later authors—has no place in their recorded imagination of "Italy."

While the lack of engagement with Italy's politics is largely due to a genuine lack of interest, Dickens does to an extent intentionally craft his narrative to avoid any mention of current political figures. True to the promise he wrote in the prologue to his text, he largely forgoes mention of any political contention while he travels through the various regions and kingdoms of pre-unification Italy. In the final paragraph of his account, however, he cannot resist

closing with a commentary on the political state, and he breaks his word long enough to opine of the Italian people:

Years of neglect, oppression, and misrule, have been at work, to change their nature and reduce their spirit; miserable jealousies, fomented by petty Princes to whom union was destruction, and division strength, have been a canker at their root of nationality, and have barbarized their language; but the good that was in them ever, is in them yet, and a noble people may be, one day, raised up from these ashes. Let us entertain that hope!
Dickens, 161

He concludes his narrative—as his reader concludes the vicarious journey through Italy—with a reflection on what Italy lends to the world, namely beauty. He dwells briefly on the thought of a good-natured but presently inferior people, disrupted by the vicissitudes of princely rule, who might one day be strengthened into a national whole through political unification. At no other point in his travel narrative does the question of Italian unification arise: from the accounts of C. D. Badham and Charles Dickens, no sense of shifting power dynamics or a brewing struggle for unification would be perceived. Yet Dickens's casual mention of Italy's future nationality, referenced once then quickly passed over, indicates a question that lurks in the background of every Victorian's travels through Italy. Badham and Dickens are clearly cognizant of the Italian national movement but are unwilling to engage with Italy as a political entity, limited by their own sense of nationality and the Romantic traditions of the Grand Tour and guidebook literature to a partial perception of Italy as a purely cultural and aesthetic space.

Chapter Two

Poetry vs. Prose

The Brownings in Italy

The personal and public writing that Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her husband Robert Browning produced during their time living in Italy is largely concerned with the Italian culture and politics in which they were immersed. Both husband and wife were English poets who lived in Florence from 1846 until Barrett Browning's death in 1861. Of the two, Barrett Browning wrote poetry that became more strongly associated with the Italian Risorgimento, writing and publishing some of her most significant work during the years of the uprisings and revolutions in the late 1840s and mid-1850s. While Robert Browning remains comparatively silent during the key revolutionary moments of the decade, Barrett Browning lays bare in her poems and private letters her ever-changing hopes and agonies related to Italian leadership, victory, and defeat. Flavia Alaya defends this discrepancy of their writing habits in her article "The Ring, the Rescue, and the Risorgimento: Reunifying the Browning's Italy," explaining that Robert Browning "passed much of the winter of 1860 playing patriot, engaging in the bravado of secret and seditious meetings in sinister cafes... hunting down every scrap of political news by day *and* by night, until he had nearly become hysterical" (Alaya, 1978). For Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose physical state teetered between precariously healthy and debilitatingly unwell, such acts of physical patriotism were impossible. Algernon Charles Swinburne, whom I will discuss in greater depth in the third chapter, later affirms the validity of writing poetry as an act of political support equal to that of attending meetings or campaigning in the streets. Barrett Browning

poured her energy into writing about the Italian struggle for liberty and unity, producing a body of political poetry that caused many to declare her “the poet of the Italian Risorgimento.”

In both her use of poetry and her perspective on Italy, Barrett Browning stood out amongst the British writers of her time. Despite the gendered concept of political discourse as a masculine space, her male contemporaries in England staunchly refused to engage with Italy as a political concept. In an article on Barrett Browning’s political aesthetics, Leigh Coral Harris reminds the reader that in his preface to *Pictures from Italy*, “Charles Dickens adamantly declares he will not indulge in ‘any grave examination into the government or misgovernment of any portion’ of Italy, because ‘that beautiful land’ requires only aesthetic reflections” (Harris, 2000). Similarly, English art critic John Ruskin “relentlessly insists on turning attention away from the action in the Italian streets and inward toward the motionless stones of buildings” in his descriptions of Venice (Harris, 2000). Both men are present when the Italian people are either actively engaged in rebellion or on the brink of another uprising, obliterating the excuse of ignorance and leaving no question that they willfully ignore the social dynamics of the streets when they turn to the page. As a male writer, Robert Browning breaks this pattern by actively engaging with Italian politics in his own poetry, but he tends to delay publishing work related to key figures or events until several years have passed, preferring to weave the benefit of perspective into his initial poetic reactions (Alaya, 1978). As a result, his writing does not reflect the course of events as journalistically as his wife’s, nor does it play as significant a role in forming the British understanding of Italian politics contemporaneously to key moments in the decade leading up to Italy’s official unification in 1861.

In contrast, Elizabeth Barrett Browning actively departs from the Victorian literary convention established by male writers that intentionally evades consideration of Italy as a part

of the modern political landscape (Harris, 2000). Her writing begins the process of tearing down and building anew the British perception of Italy in the 1850s, and Harris affirms that her work “masterfully tackles the problem of the emerging nation’s political image in Victorian England” (Harris, 2000). In letters to her friends and family, “Elizabeth carried the heavy responsibility of being in every sense their Italian correspondent. Her letters amounted to monthly communiqués from the front... and were, like her poetry, fully aware of the changing assessments to which changing circumstances might compel her” (Alaya, 1978). Unlike her husband, Barrett Browning does not wait for history to confirm or prove wrong her declarations but publishes her work unmediated by the benefit of temporal perspective. As a result, her poems contain the dynamic and contradictory opinions of someone directly immersed in a constantly fluctuating political situation. Harris writes that “Victorian literary engagement with Italy... charts Britain’s ambivalent reconciliation between the traditional concept of Italy as a gendered and aesthetic site and the modern image of Italy as an articulate, national space” (Harris, 2000), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s work forms a significant and impactful part of that transitional journey. While the prose writing of authors such as Dickens and Badham restricted their imagination of Italy, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poetry loosened those restraints and allowed her to relate to Italy in a radically different way, no longer hindered by the centrality of her own national identity. That freedom to expand her imaginative engagement and transcend the rigid concept of national borders, coupled with her status as semi-permanent resident of Florence, allowed Barrett Browning to form a more holistic perspective of the emerging nation that placed the political and the cultural side by side.

A New Spin on the Tourist's Perspective

Ironically, the depth of the Brownings' passion for the cause of Italian independence does not necessarily lead them to a deeper understanding of or appreciation for modern Italians. In her article in the *Browning Society Notes*, Britta Martens writes that the Victorians were drawn to "the remnants of [Italy's] Renaissance culture as celebrated by Byron, Shelley and Samuel Rogers, but they also shared the Romantics' disappointment with its 'degraded', 'demoralized' and culturally backward contemporary inhabitants" (Martens, 2007). In their travel narratives, Charles Dickens and C. D. Badham largely center their praise of Italy on aspects of the country pertaining to the past, but they frequently disparage the moral bankruptcy and slovenliness of the modern Italians they encounter in the streets. Despite their hope for Italy's future, the Brownings fall into the same pattern of derision for the contemporary people while retaining an appreciation for all that Italy's past has to offer. The history of Romantic literature that the Brownings draw on also illuminates the function of their poetry within the contemporary social and literary spheres. Byron, Shelley, and Samuel Rogers, the authors cited by Martens as influencing the Victorian conception of Italy, were all poets themselves, and the tradition of engaging with Italy through poetry stretches back through these writers to John Milton and many others. The genre of poetry in general does not invite the adoption of a nuanced perspective on Italy: it is Barrett Browning's use of the new subgenre of political poetry that allows her to develop an innovative way of relating to the Italian cause. With its foundation in the movement of Victorian working-class poetry, political poetry is rooted in a questioning of authority and structure that transitions smoothly through Barrett Browning's pen into a confrontation of the English response to Italy's struggle for independence.

Yet even with the possibilities opened by political poetry, Robert Browning writes a letter to their good friend Isabella Blagden, a fellow British expatriate living in Florence, in which he says, “I agree with you, & always did, as to the uninterestingness of the Italians individually, as thinking, originating souls” (Martens, 2007). Nor does Barrett Browning exhibit a more nuanced appreciation for her contemporary Italian patriots than her husband; her generalizations “echo similar statements by Victorian travellers: the Italians are cheats, have ‘no notion of work’ and love amusement” (Martens, 2007). Such a shallow opinion of contemporary Italians would appear shocking given the length of time the Brownings lived in Italy, were it not for Martens’s explanation that they “had only limited contact with Italians” and that “they interacted primarily with domestics and tradesmen” (Martens, 2007). Even though they lived as semi-permanent residents in Florence, the Brownings fail to escape Francis Palgrave’s assessment that tourists rarely form a profound and accurate impression of the native population given their extremely limited contact with individuals other than tradespeople. The lack of profundity in their relationship to Italian individuals reveals that while political poetry enables them to dissolve certain boundaries, it does not mean that they will inherently love everything related to Italy and the Italian people. The genre creates space to transcend the division between nationalities and the separation of the political and artistic spheres, but it does not imply an unconditional appreciation for the daily reality of life in Italy.

In their views of modern Italian individuals, the Brownings therefore do not advance beyond the transitory impressions recorded by British tourists and travelers in the preceding decade. However, their earnest engagement with the country as a collective idea deepens to an almost excessive extent. Martens explains that the British exalted the Italian Renaissance as the height of perfection in cultural and artistic achievement, and during the Romantic era they

attributed Italy's subsequent "decline" to the stifling of freedom and creativity due to foreign occupation (Martens, 2007). However, the conviction remained that "once the Italians regained liberty and independence, all of the dormant positive qualities that had made them the foremost European nation during the Renaissance would reawaken" (Martens, 2007). More than almost every other English native and perhaps more than many Italians as well, Elizabeth Barrett Browning embraces the latent potential of Italy with a zeal that does not match her appreciation of the country's current state. Trapped in a limited touristic perception of contemporary Italians, Barrett Browning nonetheless develops in her poetry a nuanced and personal relationship to Italy as a concept of the past and the future. She engages deeply with modern Italy in her writing, not for the inherent value of its present state, but always mediated by consideration of how contemporary events might advance or hinder the accomplishment of her dream for Italy's rebirth. In doing so, she moves beyond the level of intellectual involvement evinced by the travel narratives of Dickens and Badham into a more expansive and multivalent understanding of Italy.

Poetry to Capture England's Heart

In her masterpiece poem *Casa Guidi Windows*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning amplifies her role as England's Italian correspondent by writing direct exhortations to the British people to support the Italian cause. The poem is divided in two parts; the first is a hopeful commentary on the early events of the Risorgimento, and the second, written a few years later, is a reflection on the extended struggle that will characterize the Italian fight for independence. One of the reasons that England did not wish to support the Italian revolution was the fear that a localized military effort would quickly develop into a wide-spread European war. Barrett Browning's political

poetry firmly tackles these notions of war and peace as part of the effort to spark a response from the British. In reference to rationale of “preserving the peace,” she writes:

A cry is up in England, which doth wring
The hollow world through, that for ends of trade
And virtue, and God’s better worshipping,
We henceforth should exalt the name of Peace,
And leave those rusty wars that eat the soul
Casa Guidi Windows, 75¹

At other places in the poem, she frequently laments the brutality and bloodshed inherent in the quest for independence from a foreign government. No ardent supporter of Italian freedom could be quicker to emphasize peaceful means over all others. She urges the Italians to bring forth their inner strength, and in the same breath qualifies “yet the Heavens forbid/ that we should call on passion to confront/ the brutal with the brutal” (*Casa Guidi Windows*, 54). In a letter to her sister Henrietta during the composition of the first part of *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning declares that there are daily revolutions, “moral earthquakes” as she terms them, and that “in Florence the heart of the people boils—but there is perfect tranquility” (Huxley, 80).² She attributes all the violence of the revolutions to the Austrian aggressors and joyfully praises the nonviolent passion of the Italians. “The accounts from Lombardy are awful,” she writes, “(I mean, of the butchery performed in Milan by the Austrian troops, in their blind fury—), but glorious in results for the unarmed and triumphant people” (Huxley, 81).³ The context offered by her letters, in which she praises peaceful means of rebellion and the non-violent institution of

¹ The edition that I referenced for this poem does not include line numbers, so in every instance where I quote the poem directly, I include the page on which the quotation appears in the text.

² For the sake of convenience, I am citing this source using the last name of the editor, Leonard Huxley, and the page on which the quote appears in the text. I use the same format for citation in the Bibliography of this thesis. However, the words are Barrett Browning’s, from the letter to her sister addressed from Florence, March 7th to April 1st, 1848.

³ This quotation is from the same letter referenced in the footnote above, cited in the same manner.

autonomous rule, lends additional significance to her rebuttal of England's rationale about maintaining the peace.

Moreover, her demonstrated commitment to peace means that her insistence on England lending military support to Italy cannot be dismissed as the careless sanctioning of violence. It stems, rather, from a legitimate and deep-seated concern for Italy and its future. Having acknowledged England's attempt to mitigate bloodshed by declining to enter the conflict, she counters with descriptions of war, and declares passionately:

Such things are better than a Peace that sits
Beside a hearth in self-commended mood,
And takes no thought how wind and rain by fits
Are howling out of doors against the good
Of the poor wanderer. What! your peace admits
Of outside anguish while it keeps at home?
I loath to take its name upon my tongue.
'Tis nowise peace. 'Tis treason, stiff with doom—
'Tis gagged despair, and inarticulate wrong
Casa Guidi Windows, 76

These lines lay a heavy condemnation on England for its complacency and self-centered approach to the European political stage. She paints a striking image of the British citizen calmly ensconced at home, heedless of the hardship and trial borne by the hapless wanderer—here a metaphor for the Italian people—buffeted mercilessly by the elements in search of a true homecoming in a nation of his own. Though at other places in the poem she calls upon “my England” in embrace of her own nationality, the egocentrism of the British people causes Barrett Browning to break apart from them; addressing England, she writes “your peace,” indicating that it is not a peace in which she participates. With this small linguistic shift from “our” to “your,” she transfers her allegiance from her native country to that of her adopted home. The change is not a permanent one, as she alternates throughout the poem between the “we” of the Italians and the “we” of the British, but it serves her purpose in this section to distance herself from a peace

she has no wish to condone. Approaching the problem of England's relationship to Italy through the imaginative and creative lens of poetry offers her the ability to slide between nationalities in this way, identifying first with one country and then the other, without appearing uncomfortable in either space. Swinburne will later adopt the same practice of exchanging nationalities for the benefit of his own political poetry, while Dickens and Badham remain rigidly contained within their British identities.

Beyond her rejection of the supposed peace, Elizabeth Barrett Browning also condemns England's willingness to exploit Italy's cultural currency without repaying that debt by assisting in the country's struggle for independence. Britta Martens points out how Byron, Shelley, and Rogers frequently take Italy as the subject of their poetry, profiting off the country's aesthetic value. Barrett Browning can be added to that list of English poets benefitting from the use of Italy as subject, but she does so in recognition of the debt she as an Englishwoman owes to Italy, and she actively attempts to repay it through the political fruits of her poetry. She reminds many European nations how they have drawn on Italy as a source of artistic inspiration, calling out:

Help, lands of Europe! for, if Austria fight,
The drums will bar your slumber. Had ye curled
The laurel for your thousand artists' brows,
If these Italian hands had planted none?
... England claims, by trump of poetry,
Verona, Venice, the Ravenna-shore,
And dearer holds John Milton's Fiesole
Than Langlande's Malvern with the stars in flower.
Casa Guidi Windows, 64

Astutely centering the British literary voices considered most foundational to what it means to be English—Shakespeare and John Milton—Barrett Browning endeavors to reveal how much of their material derives not from their own homeland but from the aesthetic landscape of Italy. *Casa Guidi Windows* plays a significant role in revealing how “Britain's cultural appropriation

of an idealized, mythic Italian experience has been a means of preventing its representation as an emerging political entity” (Harris, 2000). By centering Italy through the long tradition of poetry as a purely aesthetic and historic subject, these beloved authors encourage the reading of Italy as incompatible with the prosaic concept of politics and nationality. Barrett Browning undertakes the work of revealing and removing that bifurcation, proposing a rereading of Italy that incorporates its aesthetic cultural value with its existence as a modern political space.

Barrett Browning’s aim is not to urge the British to rethink the basis of their country’s artistic and cultural achievements, relinquishing the poeticized images of Italy gleaned from their many and well-documented travels through the country. Rather, she wishes to harness the power of that aesthetic appreciation of a historic Italy for the benefit of a modern Italy struggling for independence and liberty. She sums up her position:

Therefore let us all
Refreshed in England or in other land,
By visions, with their foundation-rise and fall,
Of this earth’s darling...

Let us give
The blessing of our souls, (and wish them strong
To bear it to the height where prayers arrive,
When faithful spirits pray against a wrong.)
To this great cause of southern men, who strive
In God’s name for man’s rights, and shall not fail.
Casa Guidi Windows, 66

She could scarcely write clearer lines of poetry to rouse the British people to the burgeoning nation’s aid, nor propose a more logical result of sentimental appreciation of Italy than the subsequent support of that country’s independence. Once more embracing her identity as an Englishwoman, she calls attention to the cultural indebtedness of her own country, which has been “refreshed” by “visions” of Italy. In gratitude for that draught of aesthetic refreshment, Barrett Browning urges her countrymen to follow her example and raise their voices in blessing

of “this great cause of southern men,” lending support to the Italian people in their fight for political unity and autonomy. Her words ring with confidence in Italy’s future as well as with understanding of all that the real and imagined space of Italy has historically contributed to the popular culture of other European nations.

Embodying in her own work the tension between art and politics, Barrett Browning is hyper aware of the literary tradition of dividing Italy’s artistic and cultural past from its political present, a tradition upheld by separating the feminized idea of aesthetic Italy from the masculine concept of a political nation. Harris writes that “a commonplace implicit in the British definition of pre-national Italy is the idea of *la bella Italia* as apolitical and even ahistorical” (Harris, 2000). Barrett Browning works to dissolve this artificial division of art from politics in *Casa Guidi Windows*, actively combating her male contemporaries who enforce that binary in their writing. Since authors such as Dickens and Badham affirm their vision of Italy by centering the artistic, avoiding the political, and manipulating time to create an ahistorical space, Barrett Browning does entirely the opposite in her own poetry. Witnessing the Florentine people joyfully assembly in piazza Pitti in 1847, she dwells on the connection between the present political moment and the cultural history of the piazza. The Austrian Duke Leopold II, Grand Duke of Florence, had just granted the Florentines a national civic guard, a precursor to expanded rights for the citizenry. She reads significance into their meeting where Dante reportedly sat to write his poetry:

On the stone
Called Dante’s—a plain flat stone, scarce discerned
From others in the pavement—whereupon
He used to bring his quiet chair out, turned
To Brunelleschi’s church, and pour alone
The lava of his spirit when it burned.
It is not cold to-day...
I muse now, Dante, and think, verily,

Though chapelled in the byway, out of sight,
Ravenna's bones would thrill with ecstasy,
Could'st know thy favorite stone's elected right
As tryst-place for thy Tuscans to foresee
Their earliest chartas from.
Casa Guidi Windows, 52-53

In these lines, Barrett Browning intentionally references two of Italy's most central cultural icons—Dante's poetry and Brunelleschi's architecture—in conjunction with the celebration of a modern political victory, allowing past and present triumphs to mingle into one celebration of Italian success. Her choice to place artistic achievements alongside the political activity of her day, rather than to reference a historic political victory, consciously wars against the traditional separation of the two realms in literary representations of Italy. In the consciousness of her poetry, the present political does not have the past political as antecedent, but reaches back instead to the past cultural. Situating Dante as an ancestor of the Italian movement for independence also throws the weight of his popular cultural capital behind the revolutionary political effort. This attempt to validate the independence movement as both historically relevant and holistically Italian will be continued in later decades by the English political poet Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Barrett Browning thus refuses to divide Italy; in her work, the artistic past and political present combine to form one cohesive vision that embraces the whole of the dynamic and multifaceted nation. Harris writes that “situated on the threshold of Italy's 1848 uprisings, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) constitutes a shift in the representation of Italy in the British imagination from *mythos*... to nationalized *logos* as a unified, independent, and political reality” (Harris, 2000). Other writers in the late 1840s and early 1850s did address Italy as a political entity contemporaneously to Barrett Browning's poetry, publishing histories on Italy's political past and articles in reaction to the current events

of the revolutions (Harris, 2000). But Barrett Browning's work carries an innovative value in that she "advocated a mediatory position between historicizing and poeticizing revolutionary Italy" (Harris, 2000), creating a new lens through which to imagine and interpret the emerging nation. Previous writers were limited in their understanding of Italy and formed an incomplete mental image of the country through their insistence on viewing it as an exclusively aesthetic entity, willfully ignoring its political relevance. Her literary position as a political poet provides her with the space to blend the two into one cohesive concept of Italian nationhood, and she presents that new representation of Italy to her readers through *Casa Guidi Windows*.

The most striking representation of that concept of nationhood comes through her revision of the literary trope of feminized Italy. A common illustration of Italy in Romantic literature was the image of Italy as a chained maiden, degraded by her imprisonment and awaiting a savior-figure to restore her to her prior state of nobility. Sandra M. Gilbert affirms that "the trope of Italy or of one of 'her' city-states as a living, palpable, and often abandoned woman had become almost ubiquitous by the time Barrett Browning began to write her poems" (Gilbert, 1984). Contradictory to the intellectual understanding of the nation-state as a masculine space, Italy is almost ubiquitously referred to using feminine pronouns, reinforcing the concept of Italy-as-woman even when gender does not figure actively in the conversation. In *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning consciously returns to "the dead metaphor of gender that is [her] literary and linguistic inheritance" in order to "revise and revitalize" the image of female Italy (Gilbert, 1984). Tackling both the helplessness and maidenhood of the Romantic image, Barrett Browning refigures Italy through the image of Anita Garibaldi. Wife of the famous Italian general Giuseppe Garibaldi, Anita rode into battle "at her husband's side, in scorn,/ Outfaced the whistling shot and hissing waves,/ Until she felt her little babe unborn/ Recoil within her" (*Casa*

Guidi Windows, 82). By representing Italy through the body of a pregnant woman who actively participated in the military effort to free Italy, Barrett Browning shatters the traditional literary trope of the female Italy. Moreover, Anita Garibaldi and her unborn baby were killed in that battle, serving as a powerful reminder of the violence sustained by Italy's female body both in war and in the negation of her right to exist as a political space. This, Barrett Browning decrees, is the true image of Italy-as-woman, if a woman she must be: not a hapless maiden awaiting rescue, but a powerful and self-sacrificial female warrior, actively driving the process of her own liberation.

A Prosaic Counter Perspective

One example of a contemporary author centering a strictly political and masculine representation of Italy appears in an issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from 1859. Though the original publication adheres to the magazine's policy of anonymity, the *Wellesley Index of British Periodicals* attributes the letter to Frederick Hardman,⁴ a journalist who wrote prolifically for *Blackwood's* and many other periodicals while residing as an international correspondent in Italy, France, and Spain.⁵ "Tidings from Turin," Hardman's letter to the magazine, presents a view of the political situation in Italy and an opinion on the best course of British action that is strongly contrary to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's. Hardman's extensive experience with journalistic reporting and his strongly defined identity as a British correspondent living abroad places him in a position similar to Badham and Dickens, but without their flair for

⁴ Found in the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, edited by Walter E. Houghton, University of Toronto Press, 1966, vol. 1, pp. 109.

⁵ The biographical information in this paragraph pertaining to Frederick Hardman was gleaned from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12274?rskey=y6J1FT&result=1>

creative narration. His writing remains strictly political and discursive, the epistolary form of his prose limiting the potential for creative fluidity and directly impacting his intellectual engagement with Italy as an exclusively political space. Hardman's certainty, expressed at the outset of his letter, that the majority of readers would be at least cursorily informed of the recent events in Italy confirms Harris's assertion that many writers besides Barrett Browning were engaged in reporting back to England on Italy's political state. By 1859, the tension in Italy had risen to an unprecedented height and general war appeared not only possible but imminent, a state of affairs which prompted Hardman to address *Blackwood's* with an exposition on the unrest and considerations for the British response.

According to Frederick Hardman, in the search for the impetus of the current situation, "it is not necessary to go farther back than to that Congress held at Paris in 1856, in which the representatives of Piedmont were allowed to take their places on an equality with the plenipotentiaries of the great European powers" (Hardman, 612). Hardman clearly believes the roots of the current revolutionary atmosphere in Italy do not extend farther into the past than three brief years, negating the long history of Italy's changing political rule, foreign occupation, and independently warring city-states. Even discounting the long history of revolutionary movement, this interpretation entirely fails to consider the very recent rebellions of 1847-1849, which provide such stimulating material for the first part of Barrett Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows*. In addition, his word choice in this introductory phrase already implies that he does not believe the Italian representatives have the true right to stand on a level with the other European nations. Rather, the European "plenipotentiaries" graciously "allow" the Piedmontese "representatives" to join in the discussion, as adults might humor children who wish to be involved in an important conversation. These sentiments echo the sense of British national pride

exhibited by Dickens and Badham, revealing from his first sentences that his approach to the question of Italian independence will differ greatly from Barrett Browning's.

Despite his derisive tone, Hardman's claim for the significance of the 1856 Congress is not unfounded. The inclusion of Sardinian representatives in the peace negotiations following the Crimean War provided an important opportunity for them to demand reciprocal aid for Italy in return for the fifteen thousand soldiers Sardinia had contributed to aid the British, French, and Turkish effort against the Russian troops. The author recognizes that the "Piedmontese statesman, Count Camillo Cavour, took his seat in the Congress on behalf of the King his master,"—that is, the King of Sardinia—but he did so "on behalf, too, of all Italy" (Hardman, 612). Never before had Italian representatives faced such a public stage on which to claim the support of other European powers for their own cause, and individuals such as Cavour seized the opportunity with gusto. Hardman believes that Cavour pursued the support of England because of "an attachment founded on admiration for the English character and institutions," and that the Piedmontese statesman "actually shed tears of grief at the failure of all his efforts to induce the English Government to take effectual action in [sic] behalf of Italy" (Harman, 618). Hardman does not support Italy's complete emancipation from the Austrian Empire, but he does acknowledge that although English representatives repeatedly gave promises of British support to the Italian cause, "the sympathies and convictions expressed were never practically acted upon" (Hardman, 618). But where Elizabeth Barrett Browning would lament the inaction of the British government and condemn the hypocrisy of the representatives, Hardman regards the inconsistency of England with a dispassionate eye. His political science approach to the relationship between England and Italy does not allow space for the aesthetic or cultural

reflections that prompt Barrett Browning to sympathize with the Italians. His prose, even more straightforward than Dickens's freer narration, remains impersonal and businesslike throughout.

Though his sense of British superiority inherently precludes the possibility of identifying with the Italian people, Hardman does not negate the suffering Italy endures under Austrian rule. In response to the rebellions that began in 1847, the Austrian Empire increased the severity of its rules and expanded their military presence even in regions that were not under Austrian rule (Hardman, 616), which Hardman acknowledges as serious offenses. He does believe that such actions were initially warranted in response to the rebellions, but he argues that they have extended too far and are no longer valid now that a decade has passed since the Austrian defeat of the revolution at Novara in 1849. In a clear albeit extremely lackluster judgment on the Austrian government's conduct, he writes that "the encroachments and general conduct of Austria in Italy admit of no defense" (Hardman, 614). But though he might disagree with the Austrian government's handling of power and rule in Italy, the author only supports Italian redress to a certain point. When Cavour first broached the topic of Italian subjugation at the Congress of Paris in 1856, the author states that "he did not then pretend to a tearing-up of treaties, and to the expulsion of Austria from Italy" (Hardman, 613), referring to treaties signed in 1815 that granted Austria the right to rule under certain terms and in certain regions of Italy. But when the Austrian government had overstepped its bounds and "refused to yield what she had no right to retain," Hardman writes that the Italians responded with a determination "to wrest from her that which treaties forbid them to claim" (Hardman, 617). This language affirms his conviction that the Italians do not possess the right to self-rule in territories previously ceded to the Austrian Empire, negating the still nebulous concept of "Italy" as a national entity. Clearly, engagement with Italy as a political space does not guarantee support of its nationhood.

Hardman's perspective therefore offers valuable insight on the range of opinions held by Victorian writers on the state of Italy's existence in the years immediately preceding unification.

Hardman only acknowledges the cultural and artistic importance of Italy once, when he professes his confidence that on the part of the Austrians, "a mild government, desistance from petty annoyances, and liberal encouragement and patronage of the arts" (Blackwood's, 615) would have successfully calmed the fervor of rebellion in the Italian people. Specifically mentioning patronage of the arts as an essential component of the Italian people's satisfaction under political rule, he inadvertently confirms the validity of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dual-sided approach to the Italian question, which emphasizes the conjunction between the political and the cultural. However, the author's view on how to resolve the problem of Italy's present state takes a drastically different form than Barrett Browning's. As "an observer on the spot" (Hardman, 620) in 1859, the author determines that a large-scale war feels nearly inevitable based on the pitch of revolutionary spirit in the Italian people and the stubbornness of the Austrian government. He writes "there is, then, great peril of a conflict which, if once, commenced, would probably quickly grow into one of the most tremendous and sanguinary the world has witnessed" (Hardman, 622), thinking of the recent developments in military technology. From his perspective, a war involving Italy, France, and Austria, including other European powers drawn into the fray by allyship, would far exceed the carnage and brutality of any war previously fought between nations. Lacking Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetic compassion for the plight of the Italian people, he cannot justify a war that would seriously impact England and many other nations. Whereas her rejection of England's desire for peace centers the concerns of the Italians, Hardman's priority remains first and foremost the wellbeing of his own nation and fellow countrymen.

A Triple-Pronged Perspective

At the time when *Casa Guidi Windows* was first published in 1851, Barrett Browning was further removed from the unification of Italy than Frederick Hardman was in 1859, but both occupy a central position in the stirring and fertile years preceding Italy's official formation as a unified and independent nation. Their writing presents two opposing ideas of how the British should imagine Italy. In Barrett Browning's conception, Italy is an emerging nation, rich with a cultural and artistic past which England has willingly made its own, deserving of defense and support as it struggles into being with the promise of a brilliant cultural future. Hardman, on the other hand, encourages his readers to view Italy as a modern and highly politicized landscape, an impersonal and sexless battleground over which the world powers are caught in a dispute that might threaten the well-being of all Europe. Italy, he strives to impress upon *Blackwood's* subscribers, does not have the right to exist as a unified and independent nation. Both the Brownings' and Hardman's opinions join the previously elaborated perspective of Dickens and Badham, who viewed Italy as an aesthetic touring ground isolated from the question of its future as a nation or continued existence as a fragmented peninsula. All three ways of engaging with Italy—the tourist perspective, the political poetry effort, and the political science approach—occupied warring positions in the hearts of English citizens, combining to form a nuanced and incohesive understanding of the foreign space and people soon to become "Italy."

Chapter Three

Parallel Paths

Miss Mary Jane Furby

The title of Miss Furby's diary, "Account of a trip to Switzerland and Italy in 1877, conducted by the founder of Messrs Cook," falls in line with an established tradition of nomenclature for travel narratives. Examples of titles following a similar pattern include William Edward Baxter's "The Tagus and the Tiber; or, Notes of Travel in Portugal, Spain, and Italy" from 1852, Captain Chamier's "My Travels; or, An Unsentimental Journey through France, Switzerland, and Italy" from 1855, and Nona Bellairs's "Going Abroad; or, Glimpses of Art and Character in France and Italy" from 1857. These titles and her own all alert the reader to both the prosaic narrative and the distinct separation between nations that will characterize the tone and content of the text. Before embarking on her journey in 1877 at the age of 27, Miss Mary Jane Furby had prepared well by reading published works of travel, life, and culture in Italy: in her diary she quotes excerpts from Lord Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (1812-1818), Charles Dickens's *Pictures from Italy* (1846), John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), and George Eliot's *Romola* (1862). A note of introduction to her diary states that she "took over her father's bookseller and stationer's business when he died" (Furby, title page), so she likely had unusually free access to books and reading material for a young woman of her time. Yet her exposure to these texts and the perspectives of their authors, rather than aid her in her first personal experience of Italy, may have hindered her ability to form original impressions of the country. The words and ideas of others are continually in her mind as she travels, affecting both the mental image she forms of Italy and how she records that image in her diary. Miss Furby's

writing follows the example set in these preceding works, differing little from the established tradition of ruminating on Italy's aesthetic present and admirable past while passing quickly through each landmark city on her guided, middle-class "Grand Tour."

Had Charles Dickens been aware of this volume by the young woman who so admiringly quotes his travel narrative to bolster her own descriptions of Venice and Genoa, he would have condemned her as an example of the very worst kind of tourist in existence. Miss Furby experiences Italy along with 32 other travelers under the care and tutelage of Thomas Cook, the first man to capitalize on the middle-class desire to travel and offer an established trip through various countries of interest, promoting exactly the kind of superficial and mediated tourism that rankles Dickens to no end. Though she does not record many details about Mr. Cook's capability as a travel guide or his mode of orchestrating the journey, Miss Furby reports that he arranged every detail in advance for his travelers, who simply needed to follow where he led and appreciate the experience. Upon arriving at a hotel in Lucerne, where the group stayed while on their way to cross the Alps into Italy, she writes that "each person had a card given with their name on and the number of their room, all having been arranged beforehand by Mr. Cook (it was the same at all the hotels)" (Furby, 6). This brief comment provides all the information a reader might hope to glean about the experience of traveling with the "Messers Cook," but her lack of reason to complain on any occasion about the accommodations, sustenance, or itinerary leads one to believe that she found the trip satisfactory on all basic fronts.

A Rapid Diorama

In the creation of his itinerary, Thomas Cook demonstrates either an immense confidence in his followers' ability to sight-see without fatigue or an underdeveloped appreciation for the

length of time that a visit to each of Italy's principal monuments ought to consume. The group first tours Milan, after completing their extremely brief trip through Switzerland. In the space of two days, Miss Furby records not only their arrival in Milan but also their visits to the Cathedral, the King's Palace, the Scala Theater, the Church of Santa Maria della Grazia, the Cathedral of Saint Ambrose, and a drive by of the Roman Arena. Even with the conveniences of modern travel and the ability to take photographs, such a whirlwind of constant motion and changing scenery would leave a traveler of the twenty-first century with a headache and a blurred remembrance of the sites. Miss Furby might not have much experience with travel abroad to lead her to question Mr. Cook's methods, however, or she concurs that a perfunctory visit to even the most famous churches and monuments is satisfactory for a foreigner, because she offers no comment on the rapid pace of their visits. Her lack of experience renders her account of their travels a regression from Dickens's narration, following the same model of engagement with Italy but reproducing that experience on the page in a far less compelling manner. However, Miss Furby's diary is presumably more representative of the perspective of the average middle-class British citizen than the writing of Charles Dickens.

Unfortunately for a reader endeavoring to understand Miss Furby's personal perspective, she gives almost no original commentary at all on any of the places the group visits. Her lack of commentary does not indicate a lack of writing; on the contrary, she has something to say about every site they visit. But her notes do not contain any original thought or personal reflection, and instead focus on reporting numeric and monetary details such as might be found in a guidebook. In Venice, her description of Saint Mark's Cathedral reads like a paragraph taken directly from a history book. She writes:

After breakfast visited the Cathedral, which was commenced about 976, dedicated to S. Mark, whose remains were brought here in the 9th Century. The architecture is mostly

Byzantine, mosaic over arches represent the transit of S. Mark's body. The four Horses, from the Arch of Nero at Rome, were taken to Paris by Napoleon I and were then covered in gold, and had diamond eyes, but the stones of gold were gone when in 1815 they were restored to the Cathedral. The 500 columns of valuable and choice marbles were gathered from all parts of the World. Marbles were demanded from vessels coming eastward as harbour tithes for the embellishment of the city. Furby, 12

For a personal travel diary, the lack of emotion or individualism revealed in these entries is striking. Her writing calls to mind Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, in which the sentiments of the "I" figure are notably absent, a marked aberration in the diary genre. Miss Furby's narration about their visit to Milan's Cathedral follows the same pattern, and other than her mention that "over all is a dim religious light filling you with awe" (Furby, 10), her writing serves only to confirm what the reader would already know or easily ascertain by reading an informational pamphlet. Yet even though she rarely writes a literal "I" in her diary, the central "I" of the British middle-class citizen traveling abroad in Italy is unmistakably present on every page. She is acutely aware of her positionality in relation to all that she sees on her tour, and while her personal identity remains absent from her words, it nonetheless permeates every paragraph.

Her favorite adjective to describe every site they visit, "celebrated," sums up the essence of her diary entries: everything she sees and writes about has already been seen and written about by countless others, many of them internationally renowned authors. She seems to consider the descriptions offered by Dickens and the Romantic poets more than sufficient for her own remembrance of the emotional experience of Italy, and she does not feel the need to record her own thoughts and affective responses. As a result, she notes only biographical and historical information in her diary, perhaps to return to in the years after her trip in moments of intellectual uncertainty, but not for the revival of sentimental memories. In lieu of her personal impressions, she frequently inserts quotations from famous authors into her diary, such as Shelley's "glowing

lines” pertaining to Venice (Furby, 13), which she transcribes and allows to speak for her rather than venturing her own description. These quotations work in tandem with the guidebook information, so that between the poetry and prose of other writers she records a complete picture of Italy without the need for original reflection, and truthfully without the need of having made the journey to Italy herself. Notably, the authors she defers to are all of English nationality, affirming the distinctly British cast of her approach to Italy.

A Poetic Grounding: Romantic and Apolitical

The only city which does elicit a strong personal response from Miss Furby is Naples, which she cannot find words enough to praise. It was not an uncommon stop on the Grand Tour, but it is the one place where the descriptions of all the poets and travel writers who have come before her do not satisfy her, for she asserts that “all the praises bestowed upon Naples fall short of the real loveliness of this favored spot” (Furby, 33). She declares it the pinnacle of beauty, a gorgeous city with an essentially perfect location. In fact, her appreciation of the city is literally grounded in the very earth it rests on. She believes “that which deeply interests the traveller at Naples is not buildings, but life... [the] soil is volcanic and the people are fiery and explosive like the soil” (Furby, 31-32). Her Romantic conception of the connection between the land itself and the character of the people who live upon it is refreshingly free from the rote repetition of guidebook information with which she describes the other cities. Yet even when she waxes poetic about Naples, she cannot claim to speak from an entirely original point of view; in the height of her ecstasy over the city’s perfection, she exclaims that “it is an earthly Paradise, but a Paradise lost” (Furby, 33). With the use of that most famous phrase, “paradise lost,” Miss Furby reveals the literary influence behind her personal experience of Naples. Miss Furby would have

been acutely aware of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) during the entirety of her trip through Italy, and though the poet based his conception of Paradise on Fiesole, a town in Tuscany, she finds tangible evidence for the rich imagery planted in her mind by that triumph of English poetry in Naples.

In fact, the English poets whose works she reads before setting foot on Italian ground mediate the whole of her journey through Italy and color all her perceptions. She finds Milton's lost Paradise in southern Naples, she travels to the western coast and asserts that "looking on the Gulf of Spezzia the English voyager associates it with a melancholy interest as the scene of the death of Shelly" (Furby, 26), and in a Venetian palace in the north she claims that "the writings of Shakespeare, history and fiction, have made these rooms familiar to us all" (Furby, 17). Even when she does not directly quote these authors, their poetic reflections hover continually in her mind's eye, impacting her vision such that she views not the monuments and landscapes themselves but a rather a confirmation of the image painted of those sites by the poets of her own nation. Significantly absent from that list of English poets is Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and the image of Italy she presents in *Casa Guidi Windows* find no fertile ground in Miss Furby's diary. In the year 1877, more than a decade after the country's official unification, Miss Furby presents a narrative of travel through Italy that might have been written in Dickens's time 30 years earlier. Her writing follows a direct line of inheritance from the Romantic poets and *Pictures from Italy*, staunchly and absurdly unaffected by the decades of political turmoil and concrete change experienced by Italy in the intervening years. Contrary to Barrett Browning's fervent wish and even to Dickens's faint hope for the future, the changes produced by Italy's unification in 1861 have no effect on the image of Italy that exists in the imagination of the British travelers who engage briefly with Italy through a prosaic and nationally restrictive lens.

Algernon Charles Swinburne: Prophet of the Crusade

Writing with a similar spirit as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Algernon Charles Swinburne was an English poet who continued the tradition of engaging with Italy through the medium of political poetry in the decade following Italian unification. The tumultuous political situation carried over into the 1860s and 1870s, and for more than a decade after the declaration of unification, the future of Italy remained highly uncertain. Nuanced political relationships and policies were slow to evolve, as were the public and private sentiments both in favor of and contrary to the idea of an independent Italy. As a result, Swinburne's expression of radical politics in his poetry and the exhortations embedded in his work continued to be extremely relevant to the effort in support of Italy for many years. Embracing his identity as a writer, Swinburne repeatedly rejected calls to join active political organizations, insisting that "his role in social progress was as a poet" (Kuduk, 2001). Like Barrett Browning, he believed in the power of poetry, uniquely positioned between the political and artistic worlds, to influence his readers. He was a core member of a movement in the second half of the nineteenth century that "began to envision poetry as an agent of social and political change," with Swinburne himself describing "republican verse as the 'fusion' of the political and artistic 'senses'" (Kuduk, 2001). Swinburne's insistence on contributing to the Italian cause strictly through poetry and his affirmation of the effectiveness of his work as a poet granted a renewed validity to Barrett Browning's writings a decade earlier. Moreover, his poetry also leads him to a linguistic shift that enables him to blur the national lines defining him, opening him to the possibility of a holistic imagination of Italy similar to Barrett Browning's.

While Barrett Browning had a clear attachment to Italy as the country of her adopted home and the space of her renewed physical health, Swinburne's connection remains more

equivocal. In an essay on Swinburne's book of Italo-centric poetry, *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), Terry Meyers writes that "biographers find it impossible to isolate a simple origin for Swinburne's enthusiasm for liberty, and especially Italian liberty" (Meyers, 1993). The Italian question may originally have provided a convenient cause through which Swinburne could exercise his previously theoretical political beliefs, but his abstract interest in Italian affairs was sharpened by his close relationship to Giuseppe Mazzini, among other Italian revolutionaries who sought temporary asylum in England. Swinburne wrote *Songs before Sunrise* in response to a direct request by Mazzini, in which he "enjoined Swinburne to 'transform us, to rouse the sleeping, to compel thought to embody itself into Action'" (Kuduk, 2001). Mazzini termed Swinburne "the prophet of the crusade" for his poetic contributions to the Italian cause. However, critics from Swinburne's own time to the present have persisted in disregarding his engagement with Italy in favor of his paganism, his poetic indebtedness to Shelley, and his radical republicanism. Gwen Anne Jones, in her "Notes on Swinburne's Song of Italy," confirms that "critics have tended to ignore the fact that intelligent interest in Italian affairs, quite as much as abstract revolutionary enthusiasm, inspired the part of Swinburne's work that deals with the *Risorgimento*" (Jones, 1917). Clearly, though the poet himself was deeply concerned with the current state of Italy and the nascent country's future, that interest did not always transfer to his readers despite his confidence in poetry's power to inspire and rouse the people.

In fact, contemporary critics in England of Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise* reacted negatively to the political and ideological content of the poetry. An unsigned review was published in 1871 in the *Saturday Review*, a periodical which promoted ideas of Peelite liberal Conservatism. In the article, the presumably male author compares Swinburne to a child, who, "evidently delighted in the thought that he was the naughtiest of the naughty," immerses himself

ever deeper in a puddle of filth (Hyder, 127-8).⁶ This analysis implies that Swinburne embraces radical ideas of Italian republicanism not out of true conviction in their validity, but out of the base pleasure of sensationalism. The author reads in these collected poems a revelation of Swinburne's "contempt for everything that is decent" (Hyder, 128). Given the Italian-based republican thought that constitutes the central content in the poems of *Songs before Sunrise*, the author's sense of "everything that is decent" presumably refers to that which is English and monarchical. The author does admit that the collection contains some "lines, stanzas, and poems which are in every way admirable" and have "real poetic power" (Hyder, 131). Yet in a book of poetry written for the express purpose of rousing revolutionary spirit in support of a free Italy, the only lines admired by the author of the review are those which describe Italy when still chained and oppressed. Citing lines at random fully removed from any context, he proposes "By the surf of spears one shieldless bosom breasted/ And was my shield," (Hyder, 131) as an example of praiseworthy poetry. Swinburne finds power in the poetry that advocates for a liberated and rising nation, beautiful and sweet but also mighty and victorious, but the author of this review recognizes that power only when it sings the old song of Italy as a Romanticized captive maiden. The author's aversion to engagement with Italy as a political entity permeates even his artistic perceptions, to the point that he cannot appreciate poetry which challenges that mental conception.

Another unsigned review of *Songs before Sunrise*, published in the Whig periodical the *Edinburgh Review*, expressed a similar reaction to Swinburne's poetry. *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* attributes the article to Thomas Spencer Baynes, editor of the ninth edition

⁶ Since the review is by an anonymous author, I am citing this text using the name of the editor, Clyde K. Hyder, and the page number on which the quotations appear in the text. The text is listed under "Hyder" in the Bibliography of this thesis as well.

of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In his review, Baynes adopts the precepts of the style he condemns when he says that “much of [Swinburne’s] poetry is sensationalism run mad, foaming at the mouth, snapping rabidly at everything in its way, especially at the sanctities and sanities of life, avoiding all natural food, and seizing with morbid avidity on what is loathsome and repulsive” (Hyder, 134).⁷ With its extreme imagery urging the reader to discount Swinburne’s poetry as chaotic madness, the review attempts to erase the intentionality of Swinburne’s message and undermine the validity of his political beliefs. Baynes refuses to cite any specific lines for fear of offending his readers, but his labeling of the poems as “unnatural” and contrary to the “sanctities and sanities of life” indicates his opinion that to write such poetry about Italy goes against all that is right and just. He even goes to great lengths to avoid owning Swinburne as an English poet, evidently feeling the worth of his own nationality threatened by association. Many critics both during and after Swinburne’s time compared him to his predecessor Shelley, but Baynes rejects not only the politics of his poetry but also his fundamental connection to English culture and tradition. “We are glad, indeed,” he writes, “to think that Mr. Swinburne has not derived his inspiration from Shelley, or from any English author or English school of poetry... what is most distinctive in [his] work is derived from the corrupted school of French art and French poetry” (Hyder, 138). In attempting to negate Swinburne’s British identity, Baynes affirms how deeply a poet’s nationality impacts the critical reception of his work, adding greater significance to Swinburne’s embrace of an Italian national identity in his poetry.

⁷ Although I do know the name of the author of this review, I am continuing to cite the text using the name of the editor, Clyde K. Hyder, in order to be consistent with the citations from the preceding paragraph.

The Sun Slowly Rises

When Swinburne published “A Song of Italy” in 1867 as a freestanding work, Italy had technically already achieved the unification towards which so many had been fighting for roughly two decades. But despite the poem’s grand opening in which he imagines Italy as a woman kneeling at the feet of Freedom, Swinburne makes clear that Italy has not yet taken her final form, not yet completed her *risorgimento*. He presses Mazzini to maintain his sense of hope, implying that the Italian leader’s sentiments tended in the opposite direction towards despair and surrender. He urges him to consider, “Because the supreme sunrise is not yet,/ Is the young dew not wet?” (“Song of Italy,” 272),⁸ encouraging his friend to focus not on the as yet unreached goal but rather on the progress already achieved towards that end. The “supreme sunrise” for which he so ardently hopes is the absolute fulfillment of republican ideals in the new Italy. Though by 1867 Italy had thrown off the bulk of foreign oppression, a few areas of contention remained; Rome did not come fully under the control of Victor Emmanuel until 1870, and residual conflict continued for many years. Swinburne returns to this image of sunrise four years later in his “Dedication to Joseph Mazzini,” published as the opening to *Songs before Sunrise* in 1871. There he lays the product of his pen at Mazzini’s feet as though offering a flower, and writes, “If a perfume be left, if a bloom,/ Let it live till Italia be risen” (“Dedication,” lines 13-14). A decade after “unification,” Italy has still not risen to the height she will achieve under complete and unqualified liberty. Swinburne’s poetry thus captures the affect of the gradual nature of unification more expressively than the political writing exemplified by texts like “Tidings from Turin.”

⁸ The edition I referenced for this poem does not include line numbers, so I am citing the page on which the quotation appears in the text instead.

Yet even in its partially risen state, Italy is still more alive than England and France, according to Swinburne's conception of the nations. He believes Italy will be the one to call the others out of their torpor, "When her voice shall awake from the tomb/ England, and France from her prison,/ Sisters, a star by a star" ("Dedication," lines 16-18). Swinburne explores the idea of Italy having been "dead" and "in her grave" in his earlier poem "A Song of Italy," but here he depicts England as the country in a tomb, an implication that British readers would not have taken favorably. He also writes of France as imprisoned, and he casts two countries historically considered prominent world leaders as submissive sisters awaiting the leadership and guidance of Italy. Swinburne's language describing the death-like state of other countries was even more emphatic in "A Song of Italy." In this poem, he willingly sacrifices monarchical nations in the service of liberty, referring specifically to England and France when cries out "Die they in whom dies freedom, die and cease,/ Though the world weep for these;/ Live thou and love and lift when these lie dead/ The green and white and red" ("Song of Italy," 287). While the rest of the world cherishes England and France, the long established monarchical and colonial forces, Swinburne commits uncompromisingly to the ideal of a Republic in which freedom and equality hold supreme importance. With his exaltation of the green, white, and red of the Italian flag, Swinburne pins his hopes on Italy as the space where that republican dream will become manifest reality, and he does not look back as he allows England and France to sink into oblivion behind him. Such a complete rejection of England and all it stands for would be unthinkable for writers like Charles Dickens or Frederick Hardman. Swinburne's immersion in the imaginative space of poetry creates the unique opportunity for him as a writer to align himself more fully with the Italians than with his own countrymen.

Poeticizing Italy, Aesthetic and Modern

In the poems of *Songs before Sunrise* and in “A Song of Italy,” Swinburne adopts the trope of Italy-as-woman revitalized by Barrett Browning in *Casa Guidi Windows*. Speaking of Swinburne and his contemporaries, Flavia Alaya writes that “the debt of this new generation to the imagination of Elizabeth Browning... did not have to be acknowledged to be real” (Alaya, 1978). As Alaya implies, Swinburne does not acknowledge Barrett Browning’s contribution towards the development of political poetry nor her conception of Italy as a warrior-mother, though his own poetry builds on the foundation laid by her work. He must logically have been familiar with her writing, but he prefers to place himself in the patriarchal poetic tradition stretching back through Shelley all the way to Dante. Moreover, where Barrett Browning successfully complicates the image of Italy as a passively subdued maiden, Swinburne attempts too much in the use of Italy’s aesthetic value as a woman. He contradictorily figures the Italian female body as impossibly both mother and child, simultaneously sexual and innocent. In “A Song of Italy,” Swinburne names Giuseppe Mazzini the “Father of Italy,” preserving her innocence as a daughter by emphasizing the male role in her liberation. “Blessed is he of all men,” Swinburne praises him, “being in one/ As father to her and son,/ Blessed of all men living, that he found/ Her weak limbs bared and bound” (“Song of Italy,” 275). In this stanza, Mazzini fulfills the role of the heroic male figure, freeing the imprisoned country from her chains and therefore begetting her into a new life. Ensconced in the imagery of the powerful father is that of the “weak limbs bared and bound,” in which the helpless Italy’s exposed and bruised flesh evokes a sensuality sanctified by maiden innocence. Centering Mazzini’s role as fatherly male savior, Swinburne preserves the aesthetic currency of Italy’s supposedly stainless maidenhood.

Yet while maiden, Italy is also mother, and while father, Mazzini is also son; Swinburne calls Italy's attention to the many cities "Praising thy supreme son,/ Son of thy sorrow, O mother, O maid and mother,/ Our queen, who serve none other" ("Song of Italy," 283). The helpless maidenhood of the earlier stanza now unites with the powerful maternity of motherhood and the regal grace of queendom. There appears to be no limit to the contradictions that female Italy can embody. Within the singular image of "woman," she is both maiden and mother, both conquered and sovereign. Desirous of poeticizing Italy as the figure of a woman but unwilling to choose for her a concrete identity, he blends several incongruous tropes in one body and contorts Italy into the ultimate all-encompassing representation of femininity. The same general nature does not characterize Swinburne's treatment of all bodies; in recognition of the soldiers who died in the battle for independence, he calls out to Rome, "bend thine head/ Above these many dead/ Once, and salute with thine eternal eyes/ Their lowest head that lies./ Speak from thy lips of immemorial speech/ If but one word for each" ("Song of Italy," 285). Though the list of unnamed male bodies is long, each one receives an individual display of gratitude from the country and ideal they fought for. Embodying the concrete identity of soldier-son, each male figure in Swinburne's poem remains tangible even in anonymity, while the female figure of Italy swells to an abstract which must contain multitudes.

But though he handles the aesthetic trope of Italy as a woman rather clumsily, Swinburne works throughout the poem to repurpose Italy's aesthetic and cultural capital for positive political ends. Much like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's fusion of the artistic and political, Swinburne's modern radical poetry does not reject engaging with Italy's natural beauty and cultural history. Addressing himself to the buildings of Florence, he writes, "Halls that saw Dante speaking, chapels fair/ As the outer hills and air,/ Praise him who feeds the fire that Dante

fed” (“Song of Italy,” 282). Invoking the font of global admiration for Italian artistic and literary prowess, Swinburne redirects Dante’s cultural currency to fund the revolutionary agenda. In casting Mazzini as the one who carries on work begun centuries earlier by Dante himself, feeding the same fire “that Dante fed,” Swinburne claims Dante and all that he represents as an ancestor of the movement for independence. With Dante on their side, the revolutionaries gain historical aesthetic sanctification for their political effort, a validation which Swinburne astutely embraces rather than dismissing as irrelevant to modern politics. With delicate reverential language, Swinburne also speaks to the natural beauty of Italy’s physical landscape; “Ye fields of yellow fullness, ye fresh fountains,/ And mists of many mountains/... Ye starry-headed heights,/ And gorges melting sunward from the snow” (“Song of Italy,” 277). Rather than allowing the sublimity of these features to take central importance as in the Romantic poetic tradition, Swinburne summons them in praise of Mazzini. The timeless beauty of the land that so many before him came to view as sole purpose of their journey to Italy becomes in Swinburne’s poetry an apt vehicle for exalting the modern accomplishments of the political leaders who spring from that land.

The introduction of the Italian landscape also creates space for the most significant linguistic and ideological shift of the poem, in which Swinburne throws off his traditional national identity and aligns himself completely with Italy. His invocation of the thoroughly Italian land, the “Red hills of flame, white Alps, green Apennines,” blooms into the line “O our land” (“Song of Italy,” 277). By declaring Italy “our land” and connecting that concept of land with the colors of the flag, the symbol he repeatedly employs to signify nationhood, Swinburne enters a deeply political and modern engagement with Italy. This minute shift from *the* to *our* constitutes an abandonment of the concept of immutable nationalities, in which Swinburne the

Englishman writes poetry for Mazzini the Italian. He has now inserted himself into the body of Italian nationals, and he writes to Mazzini as one champion of Italy to another. Elizabeth Barrett Browning begins the softening of these nationalistic boundaries by shifting fluidly between “my England” and “we Italians” in *Casa Guidi Windows*, but she maintains her sense of British nationality even while embracing Italy and the Italian cause. In “A Song of Italy,” Swinburne obliterates any sense of his Englishness; he freely advocates for the death of England and the rise of Italy to such an extent that even readers such as Thomas Spencer Baynes hope to disassociate him from the English national identity. The adoption of that “our” in the poem is crucial to Swinburne’s engagement with Italy as both an aesthetic and a political entity.

As writers of prose narratives, diaries, and political articles, Dickens, Badham, Miss Furby, and Frederick Hardman all fail to conceptualize Italy holistically, and they find their engagement with the country hindered by the centrality of their English identity. Uniquely facilitated by poetry as a medium and a way of thinking, Swinburne and Barrett Browning approach Italy with the intellectual openness to creating a sense of commonality. They are thus able to move beyond passive appreciation of its aesthetics or detached analysis of its politics and move into active support of Italy as a nuanced and multidimensional national space. Poetry as a genre, even political poetry, does not inherently contain the ability to truly dissolve national borders and form a new shared identity. But in the hands of poets like Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne, political poetry transforms into an instrument through which British citizens can form an all-encompassing mental image of Italy as it comes to be an officially recognized national space.

Conclusion

This thesis has been a capstone project for me in many ways, and I thoroughly enjoyed the process from start to finish. At the outset, my interest in the topic far outstripped my knowledge of the material, so researching for each chapter continually brought new information and new ideas to my attention. That perpetual prospect of discovery gave an air of excitement to the challenge of wading through the sea of material to find relevant sources. In addition to the authors and concepts this thesis introduced me to, I also learned a great deal about the academic process of undertaking a substantial research project. From the preparatory background reading before deciding on my research question, to diving into archives and databases in search of primary sources, to compiling the information into cohesive chapters, this process has been one of growth and exploration.

Long before reaching the end of this project, I had come to realize that each one of the individual chapters could easily have been expanded into a complete thesis. Thanks to the long-standing British obsession with Italy, the decades I have included in my analysis are all steeped in a robust tradition of travel-related literature, so I found no shortage of material to choose from. If I had focused on an individual section rather than including all three chapters in my thesis, I would have been able to select a wider range of voices from a more specific period, and thereby assemble a more accurate representation of the prevailing British perspectives on Italy within a given time frame. The texts I chose are also so rich in content, I found it difficult to limit my critical analysis of each work to only a few pages. With more space to write on fewer authors, I could have engaged more deeply with each of the texts and undertaken a more comprehensive critical analysis. However, my interest in this project was not in discovering the image of Italy that existed in the British imagination at a specific time, but in tracing how that image evolved

over the course of several decades. Given that the British had been traveling in and writing about “Italy” since long before it existed as a unified nation, I hoped to learn what the travel literature of Victorians abroad represented as an understanding of Italy before, during, and after its unification. In reading the texts I have included in these chapters, I came to find that the British imagination of Italy was more determined by the genre and style of writing they adopted to document their travels rather than by Italy’s current political state at the time of their visit.

As I reference in the introduction, this project is my attempt to contribute to the lack of critical work that pairs disparate authors of Victorian travel literature in Italy under a singular framework of analysis. The works of the famous authors addressed in this thesis have all been extensively analyzed, as have a few of the lesser-known authors, but this thesis is the first work to place their texts in conversation. In my opinion, the most stimulating combination of authors to emerge from my thesis is the unacknowledged partnership between Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne. Both poets engage deeply with Italy through the medium of political poetry, and in many ways Swinburne’s work builds on the foundation laid by Barrett Browning. However, Swinburne and his critics have all neglected to draw a connection between the two poets, placing Swinburne’s work in an entirely male poetic tradition. To expand the work begun by this thesis, I would further pursue the relationship between their poetry, reading their poems about Italy comparatively in light of their individual and shared histories as English poets and champions of the Italian revolution. In arriving at the answer to my original research question, this thesis has also raised myriad other questions and areas for further study. If I decide to pursue an advanced degree in English or Italian literature in the future, I hope to do so in the spirit of holistic poeticism I have learned from Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

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